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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM OREGON PARTNERSHIP*****

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ALARMING TREND: OREGON PARTNERSHIP CRISIS LINES REPORT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE ON THE RISE

Prescription Pain Killers Second Most Popular Drug of Choice Among Teens

Will Michael Jackson Investigation Shed New Light on Issue?

(Portland, Oregon) According to Oregon Partnership, the non-profit that operates the state's crisis and suicide prevention lines, significantly more callers are reporting problems with prescription drug abuse.

This follows on the heels of a study by the Oregon Department of Human Services which found that prescription pain killers are now the second most popular drug of choice, behind marijuana.

The study echoes national surveys showing that the illegal use of prescription drugs among youth has overtaken cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin combined.

"In the last three months, we have seen a definite uptick in the number of calls from people struggling with opiates such as Oxycontin and Oxycodone," says Leslie Storm, OP's Crisis Lines Director. "This is consistent with the gradual increase in calls regarding prescription drugs that we've experienced in the past year."

OP's crisis lines staff and volunteers logged 117 prescription drug calls in April, 125 in May and 141 in June.

While problems concerning alcohol still account for the primary reason for calls to the crisis lines, prescription drug abuse is now in second place.

"Depending on the results of the investigation into Michael Jackson's death, we could see heightened awareness about the dangers of prescription drugs" says OP Communications Director, Pete Schulberg. "If that's the case, we could be looking at another Len Bias phenomenon."

Bias died from an overdose of crack cocaine 48 hours after he was selected second in the 1986 NBA draft. At that point, crack cocaine use began decreasing nationally.

"With an aging population, doctors continue to prescribe strong prescription meds that are highly addictive," says Storm. "And while younger people have received frightening information about drugs like meth and cocaine, they haven't heard as much about the dangers of prescription drugs."

Experts agree that because they are prescribed legally, prescription drugs are deemed “safe” by too many teens (and adults). And where teens obtain these drugs? All too often, from their parents’ medicine cabinets.

Parents can protect their teens by keeping medications in a secure location and monitoring their use. And as is the case for alcohol and other illegal drugs, parents need to talk to their kids about the very real dangers.

“There is definitely a lack of education for both consumers and doctors,” adds Storm. “Often, doctors will prescribe painkillers for a lengthy period of time and then become concerned about their patient becoming addicted. That’s when the patient is “cut off” and unfortunately, may start buying them on the street and through other illegal means.”

Oregon Partnership’s HelpLine (1-800-923-HELP) provides crisis intervention, including confidential alcohol and drug crisis counseling and treatment referral.

OP’s Suicide Prevention Line (1-800-273-TALK), the state’s only suicide crisis hotline certified by the American Association of Suicidology, is part of the National LifeLine Network.

Operated by experienced staff and approximately 75 volunteers who undergo 56 hours of crisis line skills training, the four lines – including The YouthLine and Linea de Ayuda - are the lifeblood for those in crisis and feel they have nowhere else to turn.